Astonishing Balloon Exploit of a Minister and His Daughter.

Went Up Above the Clouds to See the Meteors, and What Happened.

RARELY has a novelist in his fiction or a dramatist in his play succeeded in imagining a more extraordinary situation than actually happened in real life to Rev. J. M. Bacon, his daughter and Mr. Stanley Spencer.

This venturesome trio went up in a balloon just after sundown to study and photograph last month's meteoric shower. By getting up above the clouds they would have an unobstructed view of the meteors. The ascension took place not far from London, and the following narrative, written by the Rev. Dr. Bacon, is one of the most thrilling human experiences ever recorded:

BY THE REV. J. M. BACON.

THE sky remaining overcast, we, shortly after 10 p. m., mounted to the region where a murky canopy hung overhead. This canopy proved to consist of a dense wetting fog 1,500 feet thick. In traversing it the balloon, which had remained captive in the still, warm air of a mild November night, became heavily charged with condensed vapor, and at the same time greatly chilled. The consequence was that it became necessary to discharge a great quantity of ballast to enable us to penetrate the cloud. Even then the balloon again and again sank back into the mist. Only at my earnest entreaty that we should keep well above in view of the stars, and, contrary to his better judgment, Mr. Spencer continued to throw out ballast till no less than seven bags had been discharged in twenty minutes. Our observations, which have already been recorded, continued till shortly before 6, when, as though at a precise moment, the dawn suddenly flushed out with rapidly increasing light, the stars paled and, our duties being quickly over, it remained only for us to descend.

Unable to Get Back to Earth.

But there was the rub. With the earliest beams of sunlight the moisture-laden silk began to dry off and the gas to grow warmer, and, as though inspired with new life, the balloon began rising into space, mounting up by leaps of 600 feet in every quarter of an hour till by 9 o'clock it had reached an altitude of 6,000 feet, and was still rising. It will, of course, be understood that to have torn open the valve at this elevation would have been to precipitate us to earth. So the unwelcome fact had now to be faced that we were adrift simply at the mercy of the wind, and with not a cloud in sight above us to mitigate the rapidly increasing power of the sun.

I will not disguise the fact that the breakfast that was now produced was eaten in the solitude of our little car in gloomy silence and with many forebodings. Somehow there came home to us the quaint humor of the American satirist who declared that in our little England he never dare go out anywhere at night for fear of stepping in the sea. Surely, we must be already near the sea somewhere, for we had been up five hours, and steadily going west. Of our actual whereabouts, however, we knew nothing. Since within five minutes of our start we had caught no glimpse of earth. Several thousand feet below us was spread out, bathed in the intensely bright sunlight, a cloud sea of exquisite beauty. Away to an infinitely distant horizon stretched rolling billows of snowy whiteness, broken up here and there into seeming islands with huge fantastic hummocks. Elsewhere domes and spires reared themselves above the general surface or an isolated Matterhorn towered into space. In some quarters it was impossible to look without the conviction that we actually beheld the outline of lofty cliffs overhanging a none too distant sea.

9,000 Feet Up and the Balloon Bursting.

Time brought us no comfort. As breakfast proceeded we began to hear loud reports overhead resembling small explosions, and we knew what these were. The moist shrunken netting was giving out under the hot sun and yielding now and again with sudden release to the rapidly expanding gas. It was, therefore, with grave concern but no surprise that when we next turned to the aneroid we found the index pointing to 9,000 feet, and still moving upward. Two miles up above the unseen earth! And was the region below us really earth or was it already the open ocean? We had reason to suppose it might be the latter, for we had already been aloft the full limit of time recorded in any English voyage, and the speed of upper currents is always an unknown quantity. Up to twenty minutes previously we had continued to hear familiar sounds of country life—a horse trotting along a hard road, cocks crowing, the bellowing of a cow, the welcome voice of a cheery donkey, and so on. But now we had risen beyond the reach of such sounds. Misgivings began to intrude themselves.

Sending a Letter from the Clouds.

Presently, however, the screech of a locomotive far down relieved our present anxiety, and for some little time the trains on some busy line told us that we must be in the neighborhood of an important town or junction. Then the crash of big hammers broke in upon us. There are large iron works at Westbury, but these were scarcely capable, we supposed, of giving out such noisy clamor. It was far more likely that we were approaching Bristol, and a glance at the map showed us that in that case our chances were growing desperate.

Then a brilliant thought occurred to us—let me say that it was due to the lady of the party. Surely there was possible help from people below, and there was a remote chance of communicating with them. We had a pencil, also a thick bundle of press telegraph forms, ruled one side, plain the other. So with prompt dispatch we devised and carried out a system of aerial communication untried in history. The following message was manifolded on some three dozen forms:

"Urgent! Large balloon from Newbury travelling overhead above the clouds. Cannot descend. Telegraph to sea coast (Coast Guards) to be ready to rescue. BACON AND SPENCER."

These messages were smartly produced and dispatched. My daughter was clerk. The folding up of the forms into three-cornered notes was my own task; while each completed message was labelled "Important" with red chalk by Mr. Spencer and then cast overboard.

This busy and practical work afforded great relief to nerves that had long enough been on the stretch. But before it was finished we all suddenly paused and listened with all our ears, for a new sound was in the air. There was no need to exchange thoughts. We rose instinctively and listened over the car. There was the rhythmical plash of waves upon a shingly shore. Resist the thought as we might, it was unmistakable. And as if to end our suspense, up came the wail of a ship's steam siren.

Carried Out Over the Bristol Channel.

This was repeated once and again, and then for a long space dead silence reigned. But by this time it was 12 o'clock, and on consulting the aneroid we were astonished to find that we had dropped more than 2,000 feet, our height now being 7,000 feet only, and apparently we were still descending slowly. It may as well at once be said that it has since been made clear that at the moment just spoken of we were crossing twenty miles of the Bristol Channel, and undoubtedly it was some old current blowing up the estuary of the Severn that first gave the downward motion to the balloon. Moreover, the upper currents must from this point have greatly increased in speed, blowing stiffly up the sea reach, and eddying in wayward courses above the mountains of South Wales. In half an hour the sounds of earth and open country had returned, and we had drawn down to 1,600 feet above the cloud floor below us, which was now breaking here and there into little black pits like snow fields beginning to thaw.

It was 1:30, more than nine hours from the start. The sun, clearly lower in the heavens, began to look at us more aslant.

A Happy Accident and a Perilous Descent.

The cloud sensibly chilled the gas, and in less than five minutes we had fallen through below, and a wild, romantic country broke upon our view, down on to which, as to a haven of safety, we were now swooping rapidly. But our adventure was hardly yet ended. The wind here was blowing stiffly, sweeping wherever it found egress through the valleys with great violence. This, in addition to our rapid descent, caused us to strike the earth with very considerable force, and the next moment we were breaking madly through all obstacles as the wild gust caught the bellying silk of the now half empty balloon. My daughter's forearm was broken with the first rude impact. Then we charged an ugly, five-wire barbed fence, every strand of which we snapped like mere packthread. My nether garments were completely torn off my right leg, which, however, sustained only superficial injuries. Still we sped on unchecked till we caught in a dead, half-grown oak, the head of which we carried right away, entangled in our rigging. A few moments later, however, our anchor got good hold, and by this time help was hurrying up, kindly Welsh folks, cheery and willing, and most handy to boot. Thus ended our voyage.

M'KINLEY AND DEWEY ARE PAYING THIS BOY'S EXPENSES.

THE luckiest boy in the United States—in his own opinion, at least—is young John P. V. Gridley, son of that Gridley to whom, in Manila Bay, Admiral Dewey said: "You may fire when you're ready, Gridley."

Young Gridley's one object in life was to pass successfully the examination for a lieutenancy in the Marine Corps. He was studying hard when his father died, and hardship and poverty fell upon the family. It was evident to young Gridley that the money being used for his education was most sorely needed at home.

The boy made up his mind, soberly and philosophically enough, that he would have to forego the Marine Corps and seew more lucrative, if less congenial, employment.

He was disappointed, of course—keenly disappointed—and perhaps something of it showed in the boy's face when he passed Admiral Dewey without recognition.

Another man would have 'et the boy pass, but not the Admiral. He called him back and asked what the matter was. Young Gridley tried to pass it off. The Admiral insisted, and he got the truth.

Admiral Dewey rubbed his chin.

"That can be all arranged," he said. "Meet me to-morrow morning and we'll go to see the President."

They did go to see the President, and Mr. McKinley said he would arrange the whole matter. Then it transpired that young Gridley did not have money enough to pay his preliminary expenses or those that he would incur after his appointment.

The President looked at the Admiral and the Admiral looked at the President. Then they both grinned, although to young Gridley the situation was not one demanding levity.

"I think," said the President, "that also can b earranged."

It is not of record that the President of the United States understands wig-wag signals, but he certainly understod those of Admiral Dewey, for he said:

"In fact, Mr. Gridley, Admiral Dewey and myself have decided to bear your expenses until such time as you are able to finance yourself."

And Admiral Dewey nodded and laughed.

That is why young John Q. V. Gridley is the happiest boy in the United States.

Young Gridley showed some of the effects of the excitement under which he has been living during the past week, when seen at his school by a Journal reporter. He is a manly looking fellow, black-haired, of clear complexion, and has straightforward, honest, brown eyes. His height is not above the average, and in build he is somewhat slender.

JOHN P. V. GRIDLEY.

"You want to know something about who I am and what I did before Admiral Dewey took me to see the President" said the young man in answer to the reporter's question.

"I have always wanted to be a sailor. I never cared for anything else except a military life. It was my father's desire that I should follow his profession. At first I went to school at home in Erie, Pa. Afterward father sent me to the St. John's Military School in Manlius, N. Y. I was there two years and was a lieutenant in the cadet corps.

"I was at the preparatory school for the Naval Academy at Annapolis when the war broke out. I was appointed to the service about the middle of July as a post naval cadet and served aboard the United States ships St. Paul, Yankee and Michigan until December 5, 1898. No, I was never under fire. We only did scout duty along the Cuban and Porto Rican coasts.

"When the war was over and father died I went back home. I thought then that the best thing to do would be to study and fit myself for business. I studied by myself last Winter. But mother and the family were anxious for me to get in the service. I knew that if I passed the examination and obtained a commission in the Marine Corps I could be of assistance to the family—of much more assistance than if I had gone into business. We were all willing to make the financial sacrifice for my work of preparation, and I came on to Washington to study for the examinations.

"That was in October. After all those things came out in the papers about mother's pension, and after they said that the family was in actual want, I made up my mind not to accept another cent from home for my expenses here.

"And then Admiral Dewey and Mrs. Dewey took an interest in me on account of the Admiral's having known my father. The President had promised before that I should have an opportunity to take the Marine Corps examinations. The Admiral told me to meet him at the White House on Wednesday. We saw the President, and you read about what the President and the Admiral are doing for me in the papers."

Up to this point the young man had only vouchsafed information in answer to questions. "I wish, if you are going to say anything about it in the papers," he added earnestly, "that you would lay a great deal of stress on what the Admiral and President McKinley have done for me. You see, I hardly know what to say about it. About the only thing that I can do is to try my best to pass the examinations in a creditable eway. You see, it certainly does show a great appreciation of father's services to the country. Doesn't it?

"And then to think of two great big men like President McKinley and Admiral Dewey going down into their pockets to back a fellow like me!" Young Gridley paused for words to express his feelings, and then added: "It's the squarest and kindest thing I ever heard of."

And perhaps neither President McKinley nor Admiral Dewey ever had a more sincere compliment paid to him.

THE BIRD OF WISDOM AS A MASCOT FOR RUTGERS COLLEGE.

SAID Rutgers College has a mascot. It is a peculiarly appropriate one, for it is that sacred bird of wisdom, revered of old, the owl.

The owl constituted itself the college mascot. It paid a visit to the college last week and spent the day with the Greek classes. It came no one knew whence and departed no one knew whither. The boys of Rutgers opine that nothing but good can come to the college after that visit.

When Rev. Dr. Jacob Cooper entered the class room where he had instructed the Rutgers boys in Greek and philosophy for twenty-seven years he saw the visitor perched upon a long, narrow engraving of the city of Athens. The picture is one of the treasures of the college, and was bought and presented to the college by Professor E. S. Shumway fifteen years ago. The owl was large, mottled gray and white, and was perched in a reflective attitude on the right-hand corner of the frame. This, according to the ancients, was a good omen. Had the owl tempted fate by perching on the left side the Rutgers boys would have anticipated an unbroken succession of defeats at football and the consequent oblivion of Rutgers.

Here Is a Picture of the Owl, now the Mascot of Rutgers College.

The owl sat solemnly and stolidly on the picture frame all day. He heard a great deal about syllogisms and Greek verbs, and sometimes nodded approvingly.

A student, moved by memories of Edgar Allan Poe, wrote upon the blackboard beneath the picture:

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!"
"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!

The bird maintained its serenity and kept his post on the frame just above that part of the picture where is shown Areopagus or Mars Hill.

The students christened the sage, gray visitor by writing its name, "Pallas Athena," on their cuffs. When the last class left the room the gray shadows of twilight had mingled with the gray feathers of Pallas Athena, but the outline of the sacred bird could still be seen, and to it they raised their caps and shouted: "Hail Minerva!"

The bird did not answer, and the next morning it was gone.

HOW THE EARTH APPEARED TO THE LUCKLESS VOYAGERS IN THE CLOUDS.